Narrative

  “Open up your mind, let your fantasies unwind. In this darkness that you know you cannot fight. The darkness of the music of the night.” That was it, I was hooked. At the age of 17 I found myself totally enthralled with Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera*. After seeing the movie, the musical and reading the novel by Gaston Leroux, I found that the tragic story touched me deeply and brought out my creative side. I felt so bad for the Phantom’s loss of love that I felt compelled to write him a new ending. One that would give him at least some sense of resolution.

This “inspiration” brought me into the realms of a rather whimsical (and sometimes scary) world known as “fan fiction.” This was a place where people could share their writings about their favorite movies, books, plays, etc., and read other people’s stories about their favorite characters. Fan fiction is a great place for beginning writers, as there is not much pressure of forming characters and detailed plots. This allows one to focus more on the formation of your story line and the writing process. For a teenager, it presented an amazing outlet to speak and be heard.

     As for me, I was one of those rare happy teenagers. However, I had never been able to really have an outlet for my creative writing. I had only written a couple short stories and they were only for my English classes. Fan fiction was a whole other world, safe from the critical pen of the teacher.

     Needless to say, with my new found inspiration I started writing story after story utilizing the characters from *The Phantom of the Opera*. The turning point for me, however, came in a very unexpected way. I was checking through some of the writing forums I was a member of one day and saw that there was going to be a “morbidity” writing contest to be held. Halloween was quickly approaching so it was felt this genre of horror and morbid story lines would be very appropriate for the season.

The guidelines were simple. Write a story utilizing the phantom characters, however, there must be an overlaying dark or morbid element to the story. I had written darker stories in the past, so I was looking forward to actually entering one in a contest. To help me in my quest for a new and inventive storyline, I turned to the man who was a master at the morbid and gothic tradition…Edgar Allan Poe. I read through several of his short stories and poems, and quickly found inspiration in his story *The Fall of the House of Usher* and the poem *The Conqueror Worm*.

      I used the concept of an outside observer character, of my own invention, who finds himself in the midst of a very uncomfortable situation surrounded by the phantom characters. My character was the main narrator that moved the story forward, and ultimately witnessed the downfall of the other people around him. To tie everything together, I used the poem of *The Conqueror Worm* to frame the main thought of my story. I utilized it by putting it at the beginning of the story as a quote.

After several tortuous days of writing and rewriting I finally hit the submit button and waited for responses. I took this very seriously, and tried to create something new that had not been attempted before by other phantom fan fiction writers (yes, I know how silly that sounds). Fan fiction is its own subculture. People who were reading the contest entries began to give me amazing feedback and filled me with confidence. They told me that they had not read a story like mine before and that it was extremely unique, and that I had captured the essence of Poe’s voice. Basically, I had achieved what I had set out to do. I began to feel that writing was something I could consider as a serious opportunity for myself, not just as something for a class or for fan fiction. I ended up winning the contest, and I felt wonderful about my achievement. That is when I knew I wanted to be a serious writer. Also, I came to find I enjoyed the time I spent being tortured by the writing process. To me, that was the true test of whether I was a writer or not.

     I have never forgotten that moment in my life, and I always remember that as the day I became I serious writer. I owe it all to the gothic writers of Gaston Leroux, the original author of *The Phantom of the Opera*, and Edgar Allan Poe. I am happy to say that I don’t write stories dripping with blood as much as I did, but I still find them very fun to write. I now create my own characters and map out plot lines and find immense enjoyment doing so. Fan fiction was a good starting point to help in the beginning learning stages of story writing. I will always be grateful for the experiences I had there as a budding writer.